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Viewing cable 07ISTANBUL212, ISTANBUL DEPUTY GOVERNOR - EUR DAS BRYZA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ISTANBUL212	2007-03-15 16:20	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Consulate Istanbul

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000212

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ISTANBUL DEPUTY GOVERNOR - EUR DAS BRYZA
DISCUSSIONS: HALKI SEMINARY, ARMENIAN GENOCIDE RESOLUTIONS

REF: A. ISTANBUL 0136
 1B. 05 ISTANBUL 1766
 1C. 03-09-2007 BRYZA-FRIEFELD EMAIL

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and

(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Istanbul Deputy Governor for minority affairs Fikret Kasapoglu told EUR DAS Bryza during a March 9 meeting that the Minister of Education had expressed to him six months ago a favorable opinion of a proposal to re-open Halki Seminary as a two-year high school. Kasapoglu believed the Halki Seminary dispute would eventually be resolved but stated it is almost impossible for the government to take action during an election year. The Deputy Governor agreed that arguing against congressional Armenian "genocide" resolutions by focusing on a potential increase in ultra-nationalism and risks to the Turkish-Armenian community's security is not constructive. Rather, Kasapoglu suggested focusing on Turkey's tradition of tolerance for religious minorities and the fact that Armenians still choose to immigrate illegally by the thousands to Turkey. End summary.

¶2. (C) EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Bryza met with the Istanbul Deputy Governor responsible for minority affairs Fikret Kasapoglu on March 9 to discuss Congressional Armenian "genocide" resolutions (AGRs) and a proposal to re-open Halki Seminary. Bryza had requested the meeting as a follow-up to recent discussions with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and PM Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu concerning a proposal to re-classify Halki Seminary as a vocational school under the auspices of a 1951 regulation, rather than as a private, post-secondary school subject to a 1971 Constitutional Court decision which ordered all such schools to fall under the administration of the State (ref A). Kasapoglu cautiously noted he would be happy to discuss these issues but that as an appointed official, he was limited in what he could commit to do.

ARMENIAN "GENOCIDE" RESOLUTIONS

¶3. (C) Bryza stressed that the Administration is working hard to convince Congress not to pass AGRs currently being contemplated in both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. The Administration's position remains that a candid discussion about Turkish-Armenian history should take place within civil society, he said. Kasapoglu believes the case against AGRs should stress four points:

-- Istanbul's tradition of tolerance for different cultures dating back to the beginning of the Ottoman Empire.

-- Despite historical and present political tensions between Turkey and Armenia, more than 40,000 economic migrants from Armenia still choose to live in Turkey illegally (we regularly hear the number 70,000 from GOT officials)

-- The positive, spontaneous, mass public condemnation of Hrant Dink's assassination was a sign of the respect people have for each other and for different cultures.

-- Turkey's mostly young population find it hard to comprehend" what happened during World War I and politicizing "genocide" allegations will only inspire hatred.

¶4. (C) Kasapoglu further proffered that views in Turkey were changing. Turkish-Armenians were increasingly seen as part of society but that certain events (e.g., AGRs) "just make things worse." He stressed Turkey was proceeding with reforms on human rights and democratization. Citing an offer he made on behalf of the government shortly after Hrant Dink's assassination to provide Mesrob with an armored vehicle, Kasapoglu stated both he and the Patriarch agreed the need for such security measures would be temporary. He believed the same would hold true in the event an AGR passes.

PROPOSAL TO RE-OPEN HALKI SEMINARY

¶15. (C) Regarding the proposal for re-opening Halki Seminary as a vocational school, Kasapoglu stated Education Minister Celik told him six months ago that the seminary could be opened as a high school and that the Education Ministry Director General responsible for private schools recently told him the same. He noted the Foreign Ministry and the Board of Higher Education (YOK) were the key institutions

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opposed to re-opening the seminary due to constitutional challenges associated with the secular nature of the State. Kasapoglu stressed the government's adherence to the principal of reciprocity and suggested that if Greece had taken steps in favor of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace -- granting permission to elect muftis, for instance -- when it (Greece) first became an EU candidate, "things would be better" for the Greek community in Turkey. Bryza noted he was going to Thessaloniki that evening and later to Athens, to discuss these issues.

¶16. (C) Despite these challenges, Kasapoglu exclaimed he personally did not see any reason why Halki Seminary shouldn't be open. Though he is not part of the decision-making process, his views are important because of where the seminary is located, he said. The Deputy Governor noted however, that it would be almost impossible for the government to take such an action during an election year because it would be politically polarizing, domestically.

¶17. (C) Comment: That Education Minister Celik is inclined to re-open Halki Seminary is nothing new. He told Turkish daily Milliyet as recently as 2005 (ref B) that if it were up to him he would "open the seminary overnight." What is significant about Kasapoglu's revelation is that it demonstrates the GOT continues to discuss the issue internally. It also suggests the Istanbul Governor's office was brought into the conversation shortly after DAS Bryza first discussed the vocational school proposal with Davutoglu in July 2006. The fact that Minister Celik specifically talked about re-opening Halki as a high school further suggests the GOT is taking seriously the proposal to re-classify Halki Seminary so that it would no longer be subject to the 1971 court ruling that led to its closing.

¶18. (C) Comment (continued): Whether the Ecumenical Patriarchate would agree to re-open Halki Seminary as a high school likely depends on the details associated with the agreement and the level of autonomy that would be granted the Patriarchate in determining the school's enrollment and curriculum. It is also not clear whether such an arrangement would be sufficient to graduate clergy under existing Patriarchate regulations. The Ecumenical Patriarchate continued to operate a high school on the Heybeli Ada compound even after the seminary closed its doors in 1971 but was eventually forced to close the school in 1984 due to insufficient enrollment. End comment.

¶19. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this message in substance (ref C).
JONES